

Two Poets of the Peasantry

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Clare is closer to Hesiod. He too speaks as
a labourer
bred upon the land, not a polite poet on a
holiday from
town, pursuing a few touches of nature
along the hedge-
rows with a pencil and notebook. But Clare
is a labourer
out of work, a charming idler— Hesiod's
man 'that has
no ox to plough'. The old Boeotian merely
flings a
glance from his keen thousand-wrinkled
eyes at his snail,
as he goes to work; while Clare broods over
his, with a
memory of Shakespeare and of other poets
before him,
as he lingers —

To note on hedgerow baulks, in moisture
sprcnt,

The jetty snail creep from the mossy thorn,
With earnest heed, and tremulous intent,
Frail brother of die morn,
That from the tiny bent's dew-misted leaves
Withdraws his timid horn,
And fearful vision weaves.

The picture is almost painfully lovely in
its delicacy.
So with the snail of Walter de la Mare.
Hesiod's rough
hands never wove such filigree as theirs. And
yet — Trail' —
'timid' — Tearful* — do we not feel that
Clare is here
drawing himself also — pathetic product of
an age when
the Muse too easily grows pale and
consumptive? Clare's
work is perfect at its best. Yet it is better to
be Hesiod
than Clare, both for oneself and for one's
race.

But it is time to leave Helicon, with one
last backward
glimpse. It is winter now; Cyllene and
Cithaeron, Heli-
con and Parnassus, and the mountain-walls
that guard the
Gulf of Corinth westward into Aetolia, are

white-capped
with snow.

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